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Report of the Mayor's Committee

on

Race Relations

D E T R O I T, M I C H I G A N

*Embodying findings and recommendations
based upon a survey of race conditions
in the city, undertaken in 1926*

Mayor's Race Committee

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INTRODUCTORY

The following findings and recommendations of the Mayor's committee on race relations are based on a survey made for the committee by the Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research. The immediate occasion for the work of the committee was a series of race difficulties in the summer and fall of 1925. Since the World War the colored population of the city has grown from 10,000 to 80,000. The rapid expansion of the colored community has created so many social problems involving all sections of the community that it was felt that these problems could be faced intelligently only if the detailed facts could be ascertained. The survey was made in the summer months of 1926. Both funds and time were limited so that the survey is not by any means exhaustive. It did, however, give the committee and will give the public a fair and more adequate picture of race conditions in the city than has been available hitherto. Since the completion of the survey the committee has met weekly and these findings and recommendations are the fruit of its deliberations. While the committee has arrived at many specific recommendations involving official policy and governmental action it has always been conscious of the fact that the final solution of all the problems which have been revealed must wait upon the cultivation of better understanding and the diminution of prejudice in the public at large. The committee hopes that its efforts may finally issue in the organization of a permanent race commission which will enlist the cooperation of colored and white leaders in the city. Such a commission would have the double task of initiating educational projects through clubs, schools and churches by which better feeling between the races will be created; and of exercising vigilance over the policies of public and semi-public agencies in order that the conscience of the community may be focused upon and work for the elimination of the causes of race friction and race discrimination as they are revealed from time to time in the life of the city.

HOUSING

1. The demand for an Interracial Committee grew out of an unfortunate series of clashes between the races in this city, which was due to the inevitable and necessary expansion of the Negro community. The situation is, therefore, sufficiently charged with emotion to make it improbable that any recommendations of this Committee will meet the unqualified favor of extremists on either side. The constitutional rights of the Negro have been bought at too high a price to make any suggestion which might seem to imperil these rights acceptable either to the colored or to fair-minded white people. On the other hand, the mere insistence on legal rights will not avail to solve the acute housing problem which faces the community in general and the Negro community in particular. The task of the Committee, as it conceives it, is therefore, to suggest solutions which, while not imperiling legal rights, will also not ignore the cultivated or instinctive race prejudices of large sections of the community or the fear that race migrations may result in loss of real estate values, as real factors in the situation.

2. Our survey shows conclusively that in many instances where the colored population filtered into white residential sections making them ultimately colored sections, there was no loss of real estate value and in many cases the rentals and sale prices increased. We believe that frequently where property depreciation does occur it is due to the expectation that it will occur, that is, the hysteria in the neighborhood in which the penetration has begun causes many homes to be thrown upon the market and depreciation becomes inevitable. In many instances where infiltration is slow, colored persons are accepted by the white neighbors in a friendly, even though somewhat formal manner. When a colored family moves into a white neighborhood the outcome seems to depend upon the character and attitude of the nearest neighbors. If such white neighbors are tolerant and civil, the resulting situation is not bad; if, however, without any attempt to appraise the colored people as individuals, an antagonistic attitude is assumed by the whites, or if the particular colored family offends against the established standards of the neighborhood, friction is inevitable.

3. A general campaign of education is necessary to urge on colored people the special desirability of keeping their houses painted and their yards in attractive condition so that colored sections should compare favorably with sections occupied by white persons of corresponding economic status. A similar emphasis upon the personal appearance and demeanor of colored people and their children is equally desirable.

4. Peoples of various races have a natural tendency to live in their own communities and this tendency is on the whole conducive to community peace. If Negroes seem inclined to move into white districts it is frequently due to their desire to gain equal civic facilities with whites. When streets in Negro districts are kept in repair as they are in white districts and when equal sanitary, educational and other facilities are made available for them, there will be a more general tendency on their part to remain where they are or when they move to expand by group rather than by individual action. If this general tendency is to be encouraged it is particularly important that Negro centers be freed from vice and crime conditions by proper police action.

5. In order to make the acquisition and maintenance of good standards of Negro housing possible, it is necessary for banking and loaning institutions to be more liberal in their attitude towards Negro loans. In justice to the banks it must be said that property occupied by Negroes has frequently been dilapidated or in sections already deteriorated before the Negro influx. Furthermore, there is a natural fear that the Negro influx might depreciate property values in white sections. When it is once clearly shown that Negroes are moving in groups and taking especially good care of their homes and that the City Government is keeping up standards of sanitation, policing and schooling in Negro districts, it is quite probable that the banks will cooperate more willingly in assisting Negroes to own their own homes and acquire real estate.

6. The responsibility for encouraging Negro groups in the proper care of their property and for exercising vigilance upon governmental agencies that flagrant neglect of Negro districts may be prevented should rest upon a permanent committee of white and colored persons, about which we expect to make further recommendations.

7. At the present time it is especially desirable that the authorities without delay take cognizance of the unsanitary conditions prevailing in some Negro subdivisions, particularly in the Eight Mile district where there is neither adequate water supply nor sewage disposal. Many of the dwellings in the St. Antoine district are unsanitary beyond redemption. The Board of Health, which is at present making a special survey in this district, should have the hearty support of the administration and the public should it decide to condemn and raze some of the buildings in this district. The committee hereinbefore indicated should assist in finding homes for families rendered homeless by such condemnation and razing.

8. Because of the urgency for the need of better housing among Negroes, we suggest that the city administration survey the possibility of a housing scheme designed to offer credit facilities to home builders of such small income that their building enterprises offer no attraction to commercial bankers and builders.

9. Large industrial concerns would find it profitable to interest themselves in the housing of their employees and encouragement should be given to Negroes working in large factories to obtain housing near their work. Some of them at present, spend as much as four hours a day travelling to and from their work and waste energy that could be better devoted to improve efficiency in the factory and in the home.

CRIME AND POLICE

1. It is obvious from our report that general prejudices from which minority races throughout the world suffer at the hands of the majorities are operative in this city, coloring the minds both of the public and of the officials who are charged with the administration of justice, so that exact and even justice for the members of the minority race (in this case the Negroes) is still an unattained ideal.

2. The percentage of Negro crime is unquestionably higher than the average crime rate of the city. Undoubtedly this is partially due to the incomplete adjustment of the recent southern immigrant to the industrial urban life of the north. The great proportion of single men and women among the recent migrants and the consequent instability of home life, overcrowding and lack of facilities for wholesome social life, poverty and illiteracy, all these social and economic factors contribute to a high crime rate which the superficial observer will attribute solely to racial factors. The problem of reducing crime in the colored community is therefore only partly one which pertains to the courts and the police. The decrease in lawlessness in the Negro community must finally wait upon a complete adjustment of the newer migrant to the social conditions of the city, to the establishment of stable home life, to the integration of the Negro into the industrial life of the city, to the raising of educational standards and the elimination of abject poverty. A large number of Negro crimes are undoubtedly crimes of passion rather than crimes of premeditation. The lack of emotional stability to which this points will undoubtedly be gradually eliminated as the cultural and educational standards of the race rise.

3. There is evidence that in many cases Negroes are treated with undue severity, not to say brutality, by the police. The assumption among many police officers, that Negro criminals offer a special peril to the life of the officer and that consideration of self-defense, therefore, justify unusually precipitate action in firing upon Negro criminals, is not borne out by the facts. This unjustified assumption has resulted in needless loss of life on occasion of Negro arrests. This condition will probably not be remedied without much greater vigilance on the part of the department in disciplining officers guilty of unwarranted brutality. There is some evidence that the prosecutor's office is unduly lenient in exonerating police officers who have killed persons in the process of arrest. While we recognize the difficulties confronting the prosecutor's office in investigating the killing of criminals and alleged criminals

by the police, we feel that greater care must be taken in investigating such killings and initiating prosecution where the facts warrant.

4. Contrary to a general impression in the colored community the number of officers of Southern birth and heritage has not been unusually high in the Negro districts, nor can such officers, according to our evidence, be held responsible in an undue proportion of the cases in which officers shot colored people. Nevertheless we recommend that the police department formulate a policy of excluding from precincts in which colored people predominate, officers whose social background or previous history prompt them to an undue measure of race prejudice. We further believe that it might be wise policy for the department to investigate the personal bias of officers it intends to use in colored districts.

5. The number of colored policemen in the Detroit Department is unusually low. Until recently there were only 14. The cities of Boston, St. Louis, Chicago, Pittsburg and Los Angeles have from two to nine times as many Negro officers in proportion to the force as Detroit. It would be a distinct advantage to increase this number materially. The experience of other cities, so far as we are able to ascertain, does not justify the belief that Negro officers are unduly lenient with Negro criminals. On the other hand the employment of Negro officers in Negro districts excludes the factor of race prejudice both in the minds of the public and among the police of cases of conflict between police and Negro persons. Furthermore, the employment of a larger number of Negro Officers would improve the morale of our rapidly growing Negro population.

6. Our study shows considerable variation in the outcome of Negro cases before the courts in both felony and misdemeanor cases and the proportion of Negro convictions in some courts is seemingly high. This fact would seem to warrant the conclusion that there is a lack of adequate consideration both on the part of juries and judges. Some unfairness is undoubtedly the result of a lack of adequate legal counsel owing to the poverty of the ordinary Negro defendant. The facts cannot be established with sufficient clarity to warrant a recommendation.

7. We call the attention of the Community Union to the fact that inadequate institutional facilities for delinquent girls creates a special problem in the case of colored delinquent girls.

BUSINESS AND THRIFT

1. In view of the size of the city and the numerical strength of the colored population, home ownership and business enterprise among colored people is disproportionately low. The rapid expansion of the colored community through recent migration undoubtedly accounts for this fact. It would be an advantage both to the city and to the colored community if home ownership with its responsibilities were encouraged.

2. The banks have no special facilities for dealing with colored credit applicants and determining upon their responsibility and honesty. This, together with the fear of shifting real estate values have made the banks slow to grant loans in the colored districts. If home ownership is to be encouraged it is necessary that the banks pursue a more generous policy. Some branch managers in colored districts are rendering a splendid service by seeking out the more responsible and capable customers and helping them to lay the foundation for bank credit. It is to be hoped that such a policy will be more generally adopted and encouraged by the banks of the city. It will contribute much to the stabilization of the colored population and the development of leadership. Moreover, the more general employment of trained colored help would probably develop and encourage Negro business for the banks.

3. There seems to be an almost universal complaint on the part of the banks that negro accounts are overactive. There are many instances of savings accounts opened on one pay-day and closed before the next pay-day, thus greatly increasing bookkeeping expense. This practice greatly prejudices the standing of negroes in the eyes of bankers. Colored organizations might well devote some attention to the task of teaching their members correct methods of banking. If depositors are taught to maintain their accounts indefinitely and discouraged from withdrawing the entire account when money is needed, the relation between banks and colored customers will be greatly improved.

4. It is gratifying to note that there are a number of instances of very successful business enterprises being conducted on special lines by colored people. It would be well if these successful ventures could be brought to the more general attention of the public through the press and otherwise. It has been disappointingly difficult to ascertain the facts in regard to the amount, extent and variety of life insurance carried by colored people. It is desirable that a further survey be made of this field and that the indifference of life insurance companies toward colored business be overcome.

EDUCATION

1. While the percentage of retardation among colored children is unusually high there is evidence that much of it is due to the lack of educational facilities in the southern districts from which most of the Negro migrants have come. There is considerable difference in the percentage of retardation between children of northern and of southern birth, so that an improvement in the standing of colored children may be expected as the benefits of superior educational advantages make themselves felt in the first and the second generations.

2. The Board of Education is expanding its classes for children who are retarded three years or more. A further development of such classes will greatly benefit Negro children who have come to the city without educational advantages. It is taken for granted of course that such classes, while of special advantage to Negro children of southern birth, will always be available for retarded children of any race.

3. The number of colored teachers employed in the schools of Detroit is not great. While the committee would not suggest that racial groups are entitled to teachers in proportion to the number of children of the group in the schools, it is nevertheless obvious that a larger number of colored teachers could profitably be employed in the school system. There is no evidence of overt discrimination against colored applicants for positions. The small number of teachers is undoubtedly due to the fact that the majority of our Negro population have had so few educational advantages that the group as a whole is handicapped in producing its quota of teachers who are able to pass the high requirements of the Detroit schools.

The committee does not presume to say that lack of discrimination on the part of the School Board and the administration inevitably implies that there are no cases of covert discrimination in the application of general policies to specific cases by individual administrators. Race prejudice being what it is, such discrimination probably does occur in individual instances. There are no colored teachers in high schools and none in supervisory positions. The committee hopes that the school administration will make every effort to give capable and experienced teachers of the colored race a fair opportunity to aspire to such positions. No doubt both the schools and the individuals for such preferment would have to be carefully chosen at first.

4. The pressure of time has made our survey on education rather incomplete compared with other aspects of race rela-

HEALTH

1. Colored patients are admitted to most of the hospitals of the city. Where discrimination occurs it is usually sporadic and is frequently due to specific cases of irritation on the part of white patients. There is a tendency in some hospitals to keep the number of Negro patients down to a certain proportion of the total bed capacity. In the case of a few private hospitals colored patients are either not admitted or their reception is very generally discouraged.

2. Facilities for the care of unmarried Negro mothers are inadequate. This is particularly true of cases involving venereal diseases. It is to be hoped that the proposed united campaign for women's institutions will supply this lack in the institutional equipment of the city.

3. The Board of Health is to be commended for its program of maternity education and its encouragement of the hospitalization of maternity cases. This has probably been the chief cause of an appreciable decrease in infant mortality in the Negro community from 1920 to 1925.

4. In view of the fact that the total hospital bed capacity is inadequate for the needs of the city, it would be an advantage to the city as well as to the colored community if Dunbar Hospital could be materially enlarged, or possibly a new hospital project, catering particularly, but not exclusively, to colored people, could be initiated. It might be possible to interest philanthropic friends of the colored people in such a project, provided the highest scientific standards for the institution could be guaranteed. This end might be achieved by the organization of a mixed directorate and mixed staff at least for some years to come. Among other advantages such a project would help to solve the problem of providing adequate training for a larger number of colored interns and colored nurses. The hospital could function without eliminating the need of or discouraging the service of other hospitals to the Negro people.

tions in the city. We suggest that the Board of Education might profitably detail some competent person to make a careful investigation of race conditions in our schools, as they involve both teachers and pupils, to the end that where suspicion of discrimination has been created it may be allayed where it is unjustified and its cause may be abolished where it is justified.

RECREATION

1. The Department of Recreation has an excellent record of service to the colored people. It has made its facilities available to them and has increased its Negro force to keep pace with the growing colored population. On the whole, there is comparatively little race friction in the recreational life of the city under the department's supervision. The chief exception is in the matter of swimming in indoor pools where mixed bathing unfortunately becomes the occasion of unpleasant incidents. Difficulties seem to be confined to certain indoor pools and have not occurred at outdoor beaches. The department is making every effort to preserve the legal rights of the colored group and at the same time to make its facilities available for all groups with the least possible friction.

2. There is a serious lack of summer camping facilities for Negroes, particularly for women and children. We suggest that the Recreation Department and existing private and public agencies, both colored and mixed, give this matter their immediate attention. Race prejudice in country communities adjacent to possible camp sites adds special difficulty to the problem of providing fresh air facilities for the Negro people of the congested districts.

3. We suggest that institutions such as the Y. M. C. A., which possess camping facilities, make these available for certain periods for colored people under the same conditions which apply to their other camp periods. The acquisition of additional camping facilities for the use of colored people by such agencies, is also highly to be desired.

4. Since the High street community center is to be razed we recommend that the Department of Recreation and the administration take steps to provide an adequate substitute for this social center in a district heavily populated by Negro people. If the Ginsburgh library is to be abandoned by the Library Commission we suggest that this building, with the addition of a gymnasium and swimming pool, might well serve this purpose.

INDUSTRY

1. The progress of the Negro in the industrial life of the city, following the large migrations since the war, has been most creditable. Many of the largest employers of labor report that their efficiency equals that of other workers in the same type of work. They are gradually making their way into the skilled trades. Employers who follow the practice of not employing Negroes might well consult the experience of those employers who have employed Negroes in large numbers and usually report very favorably on their general efficiency. There is little evidence of wage discrimination against Negroes in the factories, partly, no doubt, because most Negroes are employed in the unskilled trades in which wage rates are low for both white and colored.

2. Negro women are under special disadvantage in securing employment in this city. There is comparatively little employment for women of any race in the metal industries of the city and in the commercial establishments the general race prejudices of the public have resulted in almost universal discrimination against colored saleswomen. Domestic service, which in other cities offers some outlet for colored women workers, is also restricted here. The moral consequences of this situation are very grave.

3. Commercial employers of broad social sympathies could render a great service to the welfare of the race and the entire community if they would undertake to open up such opportunities for employment for colored women as would be least likely to aggravate the prejudices of the public.

4. We suggest that social agencies adapted for the task, preferably the Y. W. C. A., be entrusted with the organization of a vocational school for colored girls, specializing in domestic science, the household arts and home nursing. There is at present a lack of training among colored girls and there is no agency to develop and to certify the ability of applicants for positions.

5. Trade school facilities, especially adapted to the needs of colored boys, is urgently needed in the city and we suggest that the Board of Education give this matter its attention.

6. While there is some objection in labor circles to the subsidizing of the employment office of the Urban League by the employers, there is, on the other hand, a widespread discrimination, either overt or covert, against Negroes in many labor unions, which forces the Negroes to secure employment wherever or however they can. Unions which do not discriminate against Negroes report that they are loyal and co-operative members of the union.

THE CHURCH

1. Since the church is the most important institution in the life of the Negro people it is very necessary that the various church groups cooperate more effectively in their common tasks. While cooperative ventures have developed materially in recent years, denominational feeling still seems to run very high in the Negro churches. As a result the Negro churches are not as effective in meeting their common problems and those of the Negro community as they would be under a policy of more generous cooperation. We suggest that steps be taken by the leaders of the Negro churches to organize an effective agency of church cooperation.

2. Such an agency of the Negro churches might do much to eliminate irresponsible religious organizations which enjoy a mushroom growth in the city. These organizations generally lack stability and discipline in their group life; the moral fruits of their religious fervor are frequently jeopardized by a type of hysteria which issues in social phenomena of dubious ethical value. The leadership in these groups is usually without adequate educational equipment and free of any kind of supervision or discipline. These irresponsible churches tend to work an injustice upon the well disciplined and ably led Negro churches by seeming to justify judgments on the part of casual observers against the Negro church as a whole, which the total facts do not warrant.

3. The Negro churches are in desperate need of more equipment. Only a few of the churches have facilities for their social life. Many of the congregations are able to accommodate only a fraction of the people who desire to worship with them. Their need ought to be a serious challenge to the white churches which annually raise thousands of dollars not only for foreign missions but for church extension in our own city and for other home missionary tasks. Most of the larger denominations do support one or two Negro churches in the city. The Episcopal Church recently contributed \$60,000 to the erection of a church house for its Negro parish. The Congregationalists are helping their Negro church acquire a suitable edifice. The Presbyterians and Methodists also support one or two Negro congregations. The Detroit Baptist Union is, however, the only denominational body which gives financial aid to Negro churches belonging to its general denominational group but not in organic connection with the denomination. Since the largest Negro churches are members of autonomous Negro denominations it is quite clear that the aid of white churches to single Negro churches, organically related to them, will not solve the church

WELFARE AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

1. A survey of the welfare organizations reveals inadequate facilities for the care of the children of colored working mothers. We suggest that the Urban League and the Community Union give particular attention to the establishment of additional day nurseries, accessible to colored children.

2. Several private agencies having a large percentage of colored clients need additional colored workers. We suggest that the Visiting Housekeepers' Association, the Visiting Nurses' Association, the Children's Aid Society and the Girls' Protective League secure additional competent colored social workers.

3. In view of the favorable experience of private social agencies and the Department of Public Welfare in the use of colored social workers, we suggest to the Juvenile Court that it reconsider its present policy of not using colored social workers. They might be particularly useful in dealing with colored clients in the Mothers' Pension Department and in treating delinquency.

4. Some of the outlying Negro districts, particularly River Rouge-Ecorse, Inkster, Thaddeus-West Jefferson, Wabash, Eight Mile Road, Nevada-Conant and Quinn Road, are not receiving the attention from welfare organizations which older and more centrally located districts enjoy. We suggest that the Community Union survey these districts as quickly as possible in order to determine their social needs. We also believe it necessary that the Urban League take steps to organize community organizations in these districts, through which both the general needs of the community and specific cases of distress may be brought to the attention of the proper authorities and agencies.

5. The records of the Department of Public Welfare indicate that a very large number of Negroes, most of them recent immigrants from southern rural homes, are not yet adjusted to northern urban life and are frequently reduced to dependency. While immediate aid is given to them and is no doubt necessary, it may easily aggravate pauperization, particularly

erection problem of the Negro churches. We believe that this is a problem which ought to seriously engage the white churches of the city and we recommend that a special meeting of the white and Negro church leaders be held to survey the whole problem.

since many in this class take dependency for granted. More trained Negro case workers, experienced in the problems of this group, are necessary so that the case load of each worker may be reduced sufficiently to permit attention to the problem of individual and family rehabilitation. We suggest that the Department of Public Welfare consider the advisability of organizing and consulting with case committees of representative Negro citizens.

6. The Young Women's Christian Association is so constituted that practically all Negro women of Detroit are eligible to its membership. Religiously it is sympathetic to the ideals of an overwhelming majority of Negro women. Both its recreational and educational program need expansion which is possible, however, only through the provisions of more adequate physical facilities. The present equipment is hopelessly inadequate for its task and the staff is too small. It is to be hoped that the building campaign of the Y. W. C. A. will make adequate provision for the expansion of the facilities of the Negro branch.

7. The Urban League is the one recognized organization for official co-operation of white and colored groups in the city. It also offers a common meeting ground for all colored groups and it is the organization through which special projects for improving health and recreation and for fostering art and other forms of expression have been initiated.

The work of the Urban League is carried on in a small downtown office on St. Antoine street where the executive and employment office is located and in the Columbia community center where there are facilities for recreational, clinical, musical and other group activities and where, upon occasion, professional, business and college alumni groups meet. The Columbia community center is the only social service center entirely manned by Negroes which is not connected with specific religious organizations. In view of the large growth of the city and the proportionately larger growth and complexity of the Negro group the physical equipment of the Urban League is totally inadequate. A well planned and furnished building for the League is an urgent necessity. Considering the newness of the Colored community and the relative poverty of its members it is earnestly to be hoped that some generous friend of the Negro people will undertake the financing of such a building.

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